Improving Students' Self-Confidence in Ethnic Diversity through Group Guidance: A Guidance and Counseling Action Research

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by low self-confidence among some Grade 11 students at SMK Negeri 1 Biru-Biru when interacting with peers from different ethnic backgrounds. The study aimed to improve students´self-confidence in ethnic diversity through group guidance. A Guidance and Counseling Action Research design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model was implemented in two cycles, each consisting of two sessions. The participants were 13 Grade 11 students purposively selected on the basis of low baseline self-confidence scores. Data were collected using a self-confidence questionnaire, observations, and interviews. Data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive analysis, qualitative descriptive analysis, and paired-samples t-tests to compare scores across cycles. The mean score increased from 46.69 (43.2%) at baseline to 79.46 (73.6%) in Cycle I and 91.77 (85.0%) in Cycle II. By the end of Cycle II, all 13 students (100%) had reached the high category. Paired-samples t-tests showed significant differences between baseline and Cycle I, $t(12) = -12.50$, $p < .001$, and between Cycle I and Cycle II, $t(12) = -6.72$, $p < .001$. Observational data indicated increased willingness to speak, participation in discussions, initiation of cross-ethnic communication, and positive support for peers. The findings suggest that group guidance that provides a safe interpersonal space, discussion, reflection, and role-playing/sociodrama can be a relevant school counseling strategy for strengthening students´self-confidence in ethnically diverse settings.

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Introduction

Education is expected not only to develop students' academic competence but also their personality, independence, social functioning, and responsibility. In this broader sense, educational success includes students' ability to participate constructively in social life (Sujana, 2019). Schools are major social environments for adolescents because interactions with peers and teachers contribute to the development of social identity, communication, cooperation, values, and adaptive skills (Qoyyimah et al., 2024).

Ethnic diversity is an integral part of Indonesian social life. Differences in ancestry, language, customs, and cultural practices can enrich students' social experiences, but they can also create interpersonal distance when students have limited opportunities for positive interaction across group boundaries. Putri (2020) describes Indonesia's ethnic diversity as the result of numerous ethnic groups with distinctive social and cultural characteristics. In schools, such diversity should therefore become a context for learning to appreciate differences rather than a barrier to social participation.

Self-confidence is an important psychological resource in such contexts. It involves confidence in one's abilities, willingness to act, readiness to communicate, and the capacity to participate in social situations. Abdurrohim and Saputra (2024) found a positive association between self-concept and self-confidence among vocational high school students. Conversely, low self-confidence may be accompanied by hesitation, social withdrawal, difficulty adjusting, and limited participation (Hakim, 2005; Ulviani et al., 2023). Strengthening self-confidence is therefore relevant to the personal-social domain of school counseling.

The challenge becomes more complex when self-confidence is tested in cross-ethnic interactions. Students are not only expected to speak and participate but also to enter relationships with peers from different cultural backgrounds, tolerate differences, express opinions without excessive fear of judgment, and provide equal space for others. Research on ethnically diverse schools indicates that inclusive social climates and equal treatment by teachers are associated with more positive intergroup interactions (Karataş et al., 2023; Kende et al., 2024). Thus, developing self-confidence in ethnic diversity cannot be separated from the quality of students' social experiences.

From a school counseling perspective, group guidance is particularly relevant because it uses group dynamics as a setting for social learning. Puspitarini et al. (2022), in a systematic review, identified group-based interventions as an important approach for improving students' self-confidence through a range of techniques. Suhartiwi et al. (2024) likewise reported significant gains in adolescents' self-confidence following group guidance. In addition, Alamsyah et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of culturally responsive counseling services in developing adolescents' cultural awareness in schools.

Although research on self-confidence and group-based services has expanded, a gap remains in integrating these two issues within the specific context of ethnic diversity in vocational high schools. Previous studies have commonly examined self-confidence in general, social interaction, or specific counseling techniques, whereas action research that explicitly uses group guidance to strengthen students' confidence in cross-ethnic interaction remains limited. This gap matters because change in confidence within a diverse social context should be assessed not only through questionnaire scores but also through observable changes in interaction during the group process.

The novelty of the present study lies in applying group guidance as an action-oriented intervention that explicitly frames ethnic diversity as the context of interaction and evaluates change through both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The group activities were designed not merely to increase willingness to speak but to provide direct cross-ethnic interaction through discussion, reflection, role-playing/sociodrama, and collaborative activities. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine changes in the self-confidence of Grade 11 students at SMK Negeri 1 Biru-Biru in the context of ethnic diversity across two cycles of Guidance and Counseling Action Research.

Method

This study employed a Guidance and Counseling Action Research design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection (Dewi, 2024). The action-research design was selected because the study focused on improving school counseling practice through iterative evaluation and refinement. The study was conducted in two cycles, with two sessions in each cycle.

The participants were 13 Grade 11 students at SMK Negeri 1 Biru-Biru. They were purposively selected on the basis of an initial assessment of self-confidence in ethnic diversity. The scoring classification used in the study was based on a maximum instrument score of 108: low, $X < 54$; moderate, $X = 54–80$; and high, $X \geq 81$. All 13 participants were in the low category at baseline. This selection procedure allowed the intervention to focus on students with the greatest identified need.

The primary instrument was a self-confidence questionnaire focused on ethnic diversity. Scores were converted into percentages using the maximum score of 108. The questionnaire had been subjected to validity and reliability testing before use, as reported in the original study. Questionnaire data were complemented by behavioral observations during the sessions and interviews. Student identities were represented by initials to protect confidentiality.

The intervention followed the main stages of group guidance: formation, transition, core activities, and termination. During formation, the researcher established psychological safety and trust through ice-breaking activities and group agreements. Core activities involved discussion, self-reflection, practicing verbal expression, and role-playing/sociodrama related to cross-ethnic interaction. During termination, students reflected on their experiences, perceived changes, and plans to apply the skills in the school environment. Observational findings from each cycle were used to refine the subsequent action.

Quantitative analysis included scores, percentages, means, score changes, and category distributions at each stage. Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare scores across cycles because the same students were measured repeatedly. Normality checks on the difference scores indicated no significant departure from normality for the baseline–Cycle I comparison (Shapiro–Wilk p = .144) or the Cycle I–Cycle II comparison (p = .085). Qualitative analysis described observable behavioral changes and compared them with questionnaire findings as a form of triangulation.

Result and Discussion

Result

The individual data showed a consistent upward pattern. At baseline, all 13 students scored below 54 and were therefore classified as low. In Cycle I, 10 students were in the moderate category and three had reached the high category. In Cycle II, all 13 students were classified as high. The mean score increased from 46.69 at baseline to 79.46 in Cycle I and 91.77 in Cycle II. When converted to percentages of the maximum score of 108, the mean increased from 43.2% to 73.6% and 85.0%, respectively.

To resolve an internal inconsistency in the original manuscript, the category labels in Table 1 were aligned with the stated threshold X < 54 for the low category and the score pattern observed in the data: 54–80 for moderate and ≥81 for high. Under this consistent rule, RLG's baseline score of 52 is classified as low rather than moderate. This correction does not alter the group mean or the overall conclusion.

Observational data supported the questionnaire results. After Cycle I, students began to interact more confidently with peers from different ethnic backgrounds, although some remained awkward, hesitant to speak spontaneously, or passive at the beginning of activities. After Cycle II, the behavioral changes became more pronounced: students spoke more actively, initiated cross-ethnic conversations, shared experiences and opinions more confidently, provided positive support to peers, and took active roles in discussion, reflection, and sociodrama. Thus, the improvement was visible not only in numerical scores but also in interactional behavior.

Triangulation between questionnaire and observation data showed the same direction of change. At the end of Cycle I, the mean questionnaire score was 73.6%, while observations indicated emerging confidence that was not yet consistent across all students. At the end of Cycle II, the mean reached 85.0% and all students were classified as high; observations showed more active participation and more open interaction. Quantitative and qualitative evidence therefore complemented each other in documenting change.

Paired-samples t-tests indicated a significant difference between baseline and Cycle I, with a mean increase of 32.77 points, t(12) = -12.50, p < .001. The Cycle I–Cycle II comparison was also significant, with a mean increase of 12.31 points, t(12) = -6.72, p < .001. The standardized within-person changes were large, with Cohen's dz = 3.47 for baseline–Cycle I and 1.86 for Cycle I–Cycle II. The largest gain therefore occurred during the first cycle, while the second cycle strengthened and stabilized the students' gains.

Table 1. Individual self-confidence scores across research stages

No.	Initials	Baseline Score	%	Category	Cycle I Score	%	Category	Cycle II Score	%	Category
1	LVS	50	46%	Low	75	69%	Moderate	94	87%	High
2	SM	42	39%	Low	74	69%	Moderate	94	87%	High
3	SBR	43	40%	Low	93	86%	High	95	88%	High
4	AN	42	39%	Low	75	69%	Moderate	91	84%	High
5	AR	42	39%	Low	80	74%	Moderate	92	85%	High
6	MSG	49	45%	Low	94	87%	High	96	89%	High
7	NBM	52	48%	Low	79	73%	Moderate	87	81%	High
8	RLG	52	48%	Low	73	68%	Moderate	90	83%	High
9	TVS	47	44%	Low	71	66%	Moderate	91	84%	High
10	DSL	45	42%	Low	76	70%	Moderate	89	82%	High
11	MKG	43	40%	Low	90	83%	High	93	86%	High
12	RS	50	46%	Low	75	69%	Moderate	89	82%	High
13	RRAG	50	46%	Low	78	72%	Moderate	92	85%	High

Table 2. Aggregate change in self-confidence

Stage	Mean Score	Mean %	Dominant Category	Category Distribution
Baseline	46.69	43.2%	Low	13 (100%)
Cycle I	79.46	73.6%	Moderate	10 (76.9%) moderate; 3 (23.1%) high
Cycle II	91.77	85.0%	High	13 (100%)

Table 3. Paired-samples t-test results

Comparison	Mean Difference	SD Difference	t	df	p	Cohen's dz
Baseline – Cycle I	32.77	9.45	-12.50	12	< .001	3.47
Cycle I – Cycle II	12.31	6.60	-6.72	12	< .001	1.86

Discussion

Overall, the study demonstrated a consistent improvement in students' self-confidence in ethnic diversity from baseline through Cycle II. The mean score increased by 33.08 points from baseline to Cycle I and by a further 12.31 points from Cycle I to Cycle II. Importantly, the change was not limited to the group mean: all students who started in the low category moved into the moderate or high categories after Cycle I, and all 13 reached the high category after Cycle II. This pattern suggests that staged group guidance allowed students to experience manageable social successes before being expected to sustain confident behavior in more complex interactions.

At baseline, all participants were classified as low. Observations indicated hesitation in speaking, passive participation in discussion, and avoidance of interaction with peers from different ethnic backgrounds. This is consistent with Hakim (2005) and Ulviani et al. (2023), who associate low self-confidence with hesitation in social interaction and difficulties in adjustment. The positive association between self-concept and self-confidence reported by Abdurrohim and Saputra (2024) also helps explain why students' social experiences at school matter. When students do not hold sufficiently positive beliefs about themselves, interaction with a different social group may be perceived as more demanding. Structured social experiences can therefore provide an appropriate intervention context.

The improvement in Cycle I can be understood from the characteristics of group guidance as a setting for social learning. Students did not merely receive information about confidence; they practiced speaking, listening, responding, and expressing opinions in a relatively safe interpersonal environment. Puspitarini et al. (2022) identified group-based interventions as a commonly used approach for strengthening students' self-confidence through techniques that address both cognitive and behavioral processes. Suhartiwi et al. (2024) similarly reported significant improvements in adolescents' self-confidence following group guidance. These findings support the view that group dynamics can function as a practical medium for social rehearsal.

The distinctive contribution of the present study lies in its ethnic-diversity context. The intervention was not aimed simply at general speaking confidence but at students' ability to interact with peers from different ethnic backgrounds. In Cycle I, some students remained awkward and inconsistent, indicating that cross-group interaction requires a process rather than a single informational session. Karataş et al. (2023) found that schools' approaches to cultural diversity and teachers' equal treatment are associated with more positive intergroup contact. Kende et al. (2024) likewise found that inclusive social and institutional climates are associated with better intergroup relations in multi-ethnic schools. In the present study, the open and egalitarian group climate created a micro-context in which students could directly experience cross-ethnic interaction.

The behavioral changes observed in Cycle II provide a more concrete account of how the intervention may have worked. Students became more willing to initiate conversations, lead reflections, share personal experiences, respond to peers' opinions, provide positive support, and perform in role-playing or sociodrama activities. Such activities matter because confidence can be strengthened through actual experiences of successful participation. Hamdanah and Surawan (2022) emphasize the role of concrete psychological and educational experiences in adolescent development, while Krisphianti et al. (2021) highlight experience and supportive environments in developing self-confidence among vocational students. Effendi (2024) likewise emphasizes the importance of self-confidence for students' engagement and development. Consequently, activities that position students as active participants may be more meaningful than interventions that remain purely informational.

From a person-centered perspective, the warm and accepting group climate can be interpreted through Rogers' (1961) emphasis on acceptance and relationships that facilitate personal growth. In the present group, students had opportunities to speak without immediate judgment, receive responses from peers, and test their social abilities gradually. Such experiences may strengthen the perception that they can be accepted by others and can also contribute meaningfully to the group. The shift from waiting to be invited to speak toward initiating conversations or leading reflections can therefore be interpreted as behavioral evidence of stronger self-confidence rather than merely a numerical increase.

The findings also support the importance of culturally responsive counseling. Alamsyah et al. (2024) emphasize cultural awareness as an important component of school counseling and argue that counselors should consider cultural contexts when supporting adolescents. In this study, ethnic diversity was not framed as a problem to be removed but as a social context that could be managed constructively. Group guidance therefore served a dual function: strengthening self-confidence while creating more inclusive experiences of interpersonal contact.

The inferential results strengthen the descriptive evidence. Both cycle-to-cycle comparisons were statistically significant, and the within-person effect sizes were large. Nevertheless, these results should be interpreted according to the nature of action research. The study had no control group and involved only 13 purposively selected students, so the findings do not establish causality or permit direct generalization to all vocational high school students. The t-tests provide supplementary evidence of consistent score change within the same group, while the principal evidence of action success remains the pattern of improvement across cycles and the convergence of questionnaire and observational data.

The practical implication is that school counselors can design group guidance that goes beyond teaching about tolerance or diversity by providing structured opportunities for actual interaction. Sessions can begin with trust-building, continue with discussion of diversity experiences, self-reflection, communication practice, role-playing/sociodrama, and end with reflection and transfer to daily school life. Needs assessment can then be used to provide more targeted services for students with low scores. At the school level, the findings also reinforce the importance of equal treatment and an inclusive social climate because the quality of the environment forms part of the context that supports positive intergroup interaction (Karataş et al., 2023; Kende et al., 2024).

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was small and drawn from a single school, limiting transferability. Second, there was no comparison group, so alternative explanations for change cannot be fully excluded. Third, the questionnaire was reported as having undergone validity and reliability testing, but the detailed coefficients were not available in the source manuscript and therefore were not fabricated. Fourth, the study did not include follow-up measurement after the intervention. Future research should use larger samples, comparison groups or quasi-experimental designs, follow-up assessments, and more detailed analyses of the dimensions of self-confidence.

Conclusion

This Guidance and Counseling Action Research indicates that group guidance can be used as a school counseling strategy to strengthen students' self-confidence in ethnically diverse interactions. The mean score increased from 46.69 (43.2%) at baseline to 79.46 (73.6%) in Cycle I and 91.77 (85.0%) in Cycle II. By the end of Cycle II, all 13 students were in the high category. The change was supported by observed increases in willingness to speak, discussion participation, initiation of cross-ethnic communication, confidence in performing, and positive support for peers. Paired-samples t-tests also indicated significant differences across the two cycle comparisons. Group guidance that combines psychological safety, discussion, reflection, and cross-ethnic interaction practice can therefore be considered a relevant approach for developing students' self-confidence. Future studies should test the approach with larger samples, comparison groups, and follow-up measurements.

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